

2004 ADDRESS BY SPEAKER CATHERINE L. HANAWAY

Esteemed colleagues and honored guests, this year throughout Missouri and the nation we will celebrate the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery. It will be a wonderful year of celebrations around our state and a moment to reflect on the great achievements that have gone before us.

We should embrace, learn and take strength from history, but we can't change it. Our mission in this chamber is to change the future.

The clearest view to the future is through the eyes of a child. During Thanksgiving week, my husband and I added a new child to our family. We traveled to the former Soviet Union the week of Thanksgiving to adopt our son, Jack.

We saw the remnants of the failed experiment that was Communism. We saw people whose spirits were broken, where living in a house was unusual, where cars were luxuries, and where tens of thousands of orphans wait to be adopted. Communism was an eighty-year experiment that proved that only through freedom will humanity flourish.

When we as legislators look forward through the eyes of Missouri's children, we must ask ourselves: What will the future be like? And, what am I doing about it?

In the future, I hope that this House will continue to be filled with public servants from every walk of life, who choose to leave behind their families, their businesses and their homes to serve here. I want to thank every member of this body for the sacrifices you make to be here.

I especially want to thank the families and friends of all the members. Coming here to serve is a privilege, staying home and keeping the fires burning is a tireless, largely thankless job and on behalf of all us to all of our loved ones *thank you*.

In the future, I also hope that this House continues to have the dedicated, selfless staff that serves every member and all Missouri every day. In advance of all the late nights and intense days, thank you to all those who work for the House.

When I look to the future, I want a Missouri where every Missourian lives up to their potential and steps up to their responsibility.

If we all pause for a moment and think about what we really wish for every Missourian, I think regardless of party and regardless of whether your district is urban or rural, the answers are the same.

Each and every one of us hopes, prays and works for a Missouri where every citizen is safe, healthy, sheltered, well fed, well educated, able to find a good job, and has the chance to dream and live big dreams.

We were elected by our fellow citizens to do much more than hope for a better future. We each need to ask ourselves: what am I doing about it?

First, we need to cut the ties that bind the potential of Missourians. For too long, state government has asked our fellow citizens to do their very best with one arm tied behind their back.

The first rope that should be cut is all the partisan fighting. It is time we start focusing on how we can empower people in and out of state government to live up to their potential. There are thousands of good people in state government who work hard and who know how things can be run better.

Instead of spending another session arguing over 1.1 percent, it is time we start talking about the quality of state services. 1.1 percent -- that was the difference between the budget proposed by the Governor and the budget truly agreed to and finally passed and signed into law.

If we do it again, Missourians will ask us all to answer the question of why we spent an entire session arguing over that 1.1 percent when they are feeling that they are not getting their money's worth on the other 98.9 percent.

Last year, I stood here and in a confrontational tone told the Governor a list of things he better not do. Amazingly, he choose not to take all my advice. This year, I say, Governor, I have no advice for you, but I am extending a hand. Let's leave last year's fights to last year.

Missourians know that we spend more than \$19 billion of their money every year on state government, and they want to know why that isn't enough. Why are there still failing schools in Missouri -- often the very schools where we spend the most money per pupil? Why are the roads crumbling when we are spending part of the money for highways on other state services? Why do we have nearly twice as many people on Medicaid as the national average and yet some of our fellow citizens still have to use the emergency room as their primary doctor?

Together, we must answer those tough questions by building a Missouri that begins with accountability and ends with greater opportunity.

We are in a competition every day to be the place where businesses want to come, where doctors want to practice, where the best and brightest want to live. Only when each and every person is living up to their potential do we continue to be the place where groundbreaking medical research is done, food production leads the world, technology provides new jobs, *and all of that productivity allows us to take care of those who need our help.*

Let's be clear, the reason our disabled, our elderly, our abused children have a better life here than they do anywhere else in the world is because an incredible people have been set free to think, do and thrive. It is the science, the productivity and ingenuity of people left free that produces enough food, health care, housing, technology and compassion to care for our fellow man. We must cut every rope that holds back the ingenuity, the innovation, and the creativity of Missourians who can be problem-solvers.

Today, Missouri government stands between our great people and their potential. Taxation is necessary. It funds schools, transportation and services for the elderly and disabled, but people who don't have jobs don't pay taxes.

At this moment, when the economy appears to be taking a turn for the better as some people are starting to go back to work, we, as a government, cannot reach out our hand and skim off the top the first pay raises that people have seen in some time and the growth that is creating those new jobs.

Job creation must remain priority one.

Beyond taxation there are so many ways in which this government ties the hands of Missourians.

Look at the affordability and accessibility of health care. We have statutes on the books today that make health care more expensive and less available. At the top of the list of reforms that must be made is tort reform. We must free our physicians from frivolous, malicious, purposeless lawsuits.

In every town in this state, you need only ask the doctors what has happened to the cost of their medical malpractice insurance coverage. Time after time you will hear that the rate has increased by some ridiculous percentage -- in some instances as much as 500 percent without a claim.

The net result of these lawsuits run amuck is that doctors, where they can, are passing on those costs to patients and insurers, and in far too many cases are closing down their practices.

In Macon, Missouri, at this time last year, there were three physicians delivering babies. Last year during the legislative session, one of those physicians, Dr. Julie Wood, came here to testify in favor of tort reform. When tort reform was not signed into law, Dr. Julie Wood stopped practicing in Macon and the other two physicians stopped delivering babies. Now, the closest place for a Macon woman to have a baby is nearly an hour's drive away.

Our medical infrastructure is crumbling, and if we do nothing else this session, we will reduce the cost of medical liability insurance by passing meaningful tort reform.

Our state government stands between Missourians and jobs by making it more expensive to employ people in Missouri than it is to employ people in surrounding states -- the cost of unemployment compensation is just one example.

Our unemployment compensation fund is *bankrupt*, and everyday, every dollar paid to the unemployed is borrowed from the federal government at an interest rate of 6 percent -- a loan that must be repaid by employers.

Last year, this General Assembly passed a bill to bring the unemployment compensation fund back to solvency, but the Governor vetoed it. Governor, this year we must find a way to end this hidden tax on employers.

A quality public education is the one certain way to free all Missourians from the bonds of poverty and to open gates of opportunity. Making education the state's top funding priority goes beyond rhetoric. It requires that we make tough choices, that we choose to fund education even if it means cuts to other state departments.

Last year this General Assembly made that choice. While other parts of state government were cut almost \$400 million, total funding for education actually increased by \$186 million.

We balanced the budget, without a tax increase, and made education our highest priority. Let's do it again!

Our state government is standing between abused and neglected children and safety. There are more than 12,000 children who are currently our children, as a state government. They are those children who have been taken from their homes because they were being abused and neglected. We are failing these children. Some have died in foster care, hundreds have died because, even though we had reports of abuse and neglect, we didn't intervene; and there are many foster children we can't even locate. A child living in a reign of terror won't be given the chance to live up to his or her potential.

We have had more than enough audits, investigations, and even deaths to tell us we must reform this broken system.

With freedom comes responsibility. I invite every Missourian to join with government to solve these problems, to step up to the responsibility that lies with a people to whom so much has been given. Each and every citizen can give of our own special talents and address the most pressing needs in our communities. Step forward and help, volunteer, be a mentor. If your school needs help, answer the call. If a shelter needs food, give of your treasure. If a child needs a friend, take the time.

God has blessed us so greatly, I humbly ask that he continue to bless the work of this House and the future of our state.